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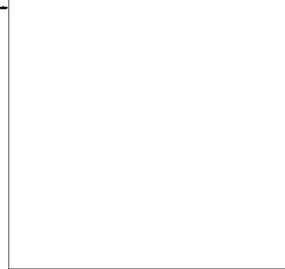
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TAGS: PREL, PGDV, IS
SUBJECT: ISRAELI LEADERS DISCUSS PEACE PROCESS,
- TENSIONS WITH SYRIA, AND DOMESTIC ISSUES
- WITH CODEL SOLARZ

1. (S) - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY

CONGRESSMAN STEPHEN J. SOLARZ' MEETINGS WITH ISRAEL OFFICIALS DECEMBER 24-29 FOCUSED TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT ON THE PEACE PROCESS AND OTHER REGIONAL ISSUES. VIEWS EXPRESSED BY THE ISRAELIS SPANNED A WIDE RANGE ALONG FAIRLY PREDICTABLE PARTY LINES. COMMERCE MINISTER ARIEL SHARON (LIKUD) CATEGORICALLY REJECTED ANY SORT OF AN INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND SAID HE WOULD REFUSE TO DEAL WITH YASSIR ARAFAT EVEN IF HE WERE TO RECOGNIZE ISRAEL, RENOUNCE TERROR, AND ACCEPT UN RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338. ON THE OTHER END OF THE SCALE, MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO EZER WEIZMANN (YAHAD) INDICATED HIS READINESS TO ACCEPT AN INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE EAST PEACE CONFERENCE AND A ROLE FOR YASSIR ARAFAT IF HE AGREED TO THE CONDITIONS OUTLINED ABOVE. IN HIS MEETING WITH SOLARZ, DEFENSE MINISTER YITZHAK RABIN (LABOR) FOCUSED ON HEIGHTENED SYRIAN/ISRAELI TENSIONS. RABIN SAID THAT HE DOES NOT BELIEVE SYRIA WANTS HOSTILITIES BUT DAMASCUS FEELS FREE TO USE LEBANON AS A FRONT FOR HARASSING ISRAEL. BY DEPLOYING MISSILES TO THE SYRIAN-LEBANESE BORDER TO LIMIT ISRAEL'S FREEDOM OF FLIGHT OVER LEBANON, SYRIA HAS CREATED A "POTENTIAL SOURCE OF ESCALATION." CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ ALSO DISCUSSED A BROAD RANGE OF DOMESTIC ISSUES WITH HIS ISRAELI INTERLOCUTORS, INCLUDING AMONG OTHERS THE ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS PARTIES IN ISRAELI SOCIETY. END SUMMARY.

3. DURING HIS DECEMBER 24-29 VISIT TO ISRAEL CONGRESSMAN STEPHEN SOLARZ MET WITH AN

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EXTRAORDINARILY WIDE RANGE OF ISRAELI OFFICIALS, POLITICAL LEADERS, JOURNALISTS, ACADEMIC SPECIALISTS, AND OTHER PUBLIC FIGURES. THE FOLLOWING ARE SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS OF CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ' DISCUSSIONS WITH PROMINENT OFFICIALS. THE DELEGATION LED BY CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ INCLUDED MRS. SOLARZ, PERSONAL ADVISORS STEPHEN AND LILIANE SHALOM, HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE STAFFER STANLEY ROTH, AND FORMER AIDE STEPHEN SILBIGER.

4. THE PEACE PROCESS/NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES

COMMERCE MINISTER ARIEL SHARON (LIKUD) TOLD CODEL SOLARZ THAT HE WOULD SUPPORT DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH KING HUSSEIN BUT OPPOSES ANY SORT OF INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND WOULD NOT DEAL WITH ARAFAT EVEN IF HE RECOGNIZES ISRAEL, RENOUNCES TERROR AND ACCEPTS UN RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338. HE WOULD DEAL WITH A JOINT JORDANIAN/PALESTINIAN DELEGATION AS LONG AS THE PALESTINIAN DELEGATES WERE NOT PLO MEMBERS OR SUPPORTERS. RESPONDING TO CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ' QUESTION AS TO WHETHER IT WAS POSSIBLE TO FIND CREDIBLE PALESTINIAN INTERLOCUTORS WHO WERE NOT ASSOCIATED WITH THE PLO, SHARON SAID, "THAT'S THEIR PROBLEM." THE FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER ALSO ASSERTED THAT INSPIRATION, INSTRUCTIONS, AND FUNDS FOR TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN ISRAEL HAD ORIGINATED IN RECENT MONTHS IN PLO OFFICES IN JORDAN, AND HE SAID KING HUSSEIN SHOULD TAKE THE "NECESSARY STEPS" AGAINST THE PLO HEADQUARTERS IN AMMAN.

5. SOLARZ' VISIT WITH DEFENSE MINISTER RABIN FOCUSED IN LARGE PART ON ESCALATING SYRIAN-ISRAELI TENSIONS. RABIN SAID THAT SYRIA'S FUNDAMENTAL GOALS ARE TO PREVENT ANOTHER BILATERAL PEACE TREATY BETWEEN ISRAEL AND AN ARAB COUNTRY AND, OVER THE LONG TERM, TO ACHIEVE STRATEGIC BALANCE WITH ISRAEL. HE SAID HE BELIEVED THE SYRIANS WOULD CONTINUE TO KEEP THE GOLAN FRONT QUIET SO LONG AS THEY HAD NOT DECIDED ON ALL-OUT CONFLICT. IN LEBANON, HOWEVER, THEY FEEL FREE TO HARRASS ISRAEL BY ENCOURAGING SYMPATHETIC FACTIONS TO

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ATTACK THE SECURITY ZONE AND ISRAEL AND BY LIMITING ISRAEL'S FREEDOM OF FLIGHT OVER LEBANON. RABIN DESCRIBED SYRIA'S DEPLOYMENT OF MOBILE SAM'S IN LEBANON AND SA-2'S ON THE BORDER AS "BREAKING THE RULES OF THE GAME OF THE LAST THREE YEARS." IN RESPONSE TO CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ' QUESTIONS, RABIN SAID THAT THE SYRIAN MISSILE DEPLOYMENTS "REDUCE SIGNIFICANTLY" ISRAEL'S INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION CAPABILITIES IN LEBANON, BUT HE REFUSED TO ELABORATE. RABIN SAID THAT THE MISSILE DEPLOYMENT SERVED AS A "POTENTIAL SOURCE OF ESCALATION" BUT THAT HE WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO SAY WHEN AND HOW THIS MIGHT HAPPEN. RABIN SAID HE ASSUMED THAT NEITHER SYRIA NOR ISRAEL WANTED HOSTILITIES, BUT -- AS IN THE PAST -- THINGS COULD SOMETIMES "SNOWBALL."

6. RESPONDING TO CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ' INQUIRY REGARDING ARMS SALES TO JORDAN, RABIN NOTED THAT MOBILE HAWKS WOULD LIMIT ISRAEL'S FREEDOM OF FLIGHT WITHIN ISRAELI TERRITORY ITSELF. RABIN

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ALSO SUGGESTED THAT JORDAN'S RAPPROCHEMENT WITH SYRIA REMOVED THE PRINCIPAL THREAT THAT JORDAN USED TO JUSTIFY THE SALE. RABIN WAS ALSO SKEPTICAL THAT HUSSEIN WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL IN HIS EFFORTS TO WIN ASSAD'S ACQUIESCENCE TO JORDAN MOVING FORWARD ON THE PEACE PROCESS. RABIN WAS LIKEWISE DOUBTFUL THAT HUSSEIN WOULD BE ABLE TO CONVINCE ARAFAT TO ACCEPT THE "NECESSARY CONDITIONS" REGARDING THE PEACE PROCESS.

7. MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO EZER WEIZMANN IN HIS MEETING WITH CODEL SOLARZ EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF REINVIGORATING THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH EGYPT. WEIZMANN WORRIED THAT IF THE RELATIONSHIP WAS NOT IMPROVED IT WOULD NOT STAY STATIC BUT DETERIORATE. HE SUGGESTED THAT IF PERES COULD NOT GET INNER-CABINET APPROVAL FOR A TABA COMPROMISE, HE SHOULD SUBMIT IT TO THE FULL CABINET AND ACCEPT THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF CIRCUMVENTING THE MINI-CABINET. WEIZMANN ALSO BELIEVES THAT THE JORDANIANS WILL NOT ENTER NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL UNTIL THEY SEE PROGRESS IN ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS. THIS, HE BELIEVES, IS THE REAL REASON THAT THE LIKUD IS FORESTALLING PROGRESS ON THE EGYPTIAN RELATIONSHIP.

8. WEIZMANN WAS WILLING TO AGREE TO AN INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION FROM CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ, WEIZMANN SAID HE WOULD EVEN BE WILLING TO TALK WITH YASSIR ARAFAT IF HE RECOGNIZED ISRAEL, RENOUNCED TERROR, AND ACCEPTED UN RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338. NONETHELESS, HE WAS SKEPTICAL THAT ARAFAT WOULD MEET THESE CONDITIONS. WEIZMANN ADVOCATED IMPLEMENTING UNILATERAL AUTONOMY IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA TO GET THINGS MOVING.

9. IN ANOTHER MEETING, KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN ABBA EBAN DECRIED THE LIKUD'S "HANG UP" WITH AN INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST. EBAN ASSESSED THAT THE LIKUD WAS HOLDING FAST ON THIS ISSUE MERELY TO PREVENT THE PROCESS FROM MOVING FORWARD. EBAN NOTED PERES' COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH EGYPT AS AN IMPORTANT FIRST STEP TO CREATING MOMENTUM IN THE PEACE PROCESS.

10. MEETINGS WITH RELIGIOUS PARTY LEADERS

IN AN HOUR-LONG MEETING WITH INTERIOR MINISTER AND SHAS PARTY LEADER YITZHAK PERETZ, THE RABBI STRESSED HIS PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO PROMOTING GREATER RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SHAS MUST PROCEED GRADUALLY IN THIS SPHERE GIVEN THE MOSTLY SECULAR NATURE OF ISRAELI SOCIETY. PERETZ ALSO INDICATED CONSIDERABLE FLEXIBILITY ON PEACE ISSUES.

11. ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES PERETZ STRESSED THE PERSONAL ORTHODOXY OF HIS PARTY'S FOLLOWERS. HE

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CONTRASTED HIS PARTY WITH THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY (NRP), WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS PREPARED TO COMPROMISE ON BOTH PERSONAL AND NATIONAL RELIGIOUS ISSUES, MENTIONING SPECIFICALLY THE MORMON CENTER

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IN JERUSALEM. HE SAID THAT SHAS WAS CLOSE TO AGUDAT ISRAEL ON BOTH RELIGIOUS AND PEACE ISSUES BUT "NOT INTERESTED" IN MERGING WITH THE AGUDAH BECAUSE IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR SEPHARDIM TO HAVE THEIR OWN REPRESENTATION.

12. PERETZ EXPRESSED HIS WILLINGNESS TO GIVE UP PARTS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES IN EXCHANGE FOR "REAL PEACE." HE ALSO SUPPORTED AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IF IT WAS ONLY A FRAMEWORK FOR AND NOT A REPLACEMENT TO DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND A JORDANIAN/PALESTINIAN DELEGATION. ON TABA, PERETZ SAID THAT IT "DID NOT MAKE SENSE" TO KEEP THE STRIP AFTER GIVING UP ALL OF SINAI.

13. LIKE PERETZ, AGUDAT ISRAEL PARTY LEADER AVRAHAM SHAPIRA STRESSED THAT HIS PARTY'S PRIMARY GOAL IS TO PROMOTE A MORE RELIGIOUS NATURE FOR ISRAEL. HE ALSO INDICATED WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE TERRITORIALLY.

14. KNESSET MEMBER SHAPIRA SAID EXPLICITLY THAT HIS PARTY'S DECISIONS ON POSSIBLE FUTURE GOVERNMENT COALITIONS WOULD DEPEND ON "WHAT WE CAN RECEIVE ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES." HE FELT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE AGUDAH TO ENTER A NARROW LABOR GOVERNMENT BECAUSE THE LIKUD IN OPPOSITION WOULD PROPOSE MORE ATTRACTIVE RELIGIOUS LEGISLATION IN AN ATTEMPT TO ENTICE THE AGUDAH OUT OF THE COALITION. SHAPIRA, WHO HAS BEEN ONE OF THE LEADING RELIGIOUS PARTY FIGURES IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE BUILDING OF THE MORMON CENTER IN JERUSALEM, STRESSED THAT AGUDAT ISRAEL IS NOT OPPOSED TO THE MORMONS OR ANY OTHER RELIGION, BUT IS ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT THE JERUSALEM CENTER WOULD BECOME A BASE FOR MISSIONARY ACTIVITY.

15. SHAPIRA INDICATED THAT AGUDAT ISRAEL WOULD SUPPORT TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE BUT EMPHASIZED THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT NOT TO RETURN TERRITORIES WHICH WOULD ENDANGER ISRAEL'S SECURITY. SHAPIRA STRONGLY SUPPORTED NEGOTIATING WITH HUSSEIN WHO "WANTS TO MAKE PEACE." HE ALSO RULED OUT ANY ROLE IN NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE PLO.

16. OF ALL THE RELIGIOUS PARTY FIGURES CODEL SOLARZ MET, NRP LEADER YOSEF BURG, PROBABLY MINDFUL OF HIS MORE HAWKISH CONSTITUENCY, WAS LEAST FORTHCOMING ON TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE. HE SAID HE WOULD SUPPORT ONLY MINOR MODIFICATIONS AND PROPOSED A CAMP DAVID-STYLE AUTONOMY PLAN AS THE BEST SOLUTION IN THE WEST BANK. HE FIRMLY OPPOSED AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN ENTITY IN THE WEST BANK AND ASSERTED THAT ISRAEL COULD NOT COUNT ON KING HUSSEIN RULING FOREVER.

17. BURG DISPLAYED GREAT OPTIMISM CONCERNING THE CHANCES FOR HIS PARTY'S "RENAISSANCE." HE SPECULATED THAT MANY FORMER NRP MEMBERS WHO HAD DEFECTED OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS TO MORASHA AND TAMI WOULD NOW RETURN. ON NATIONAL POLITICS, BURG NOTED THAT THE NRP HAS A "PROGRESSIVE" VIEW ON MANY ISSUES AND DOES NOT NECESSARILY CONSIDER THE LABOR PARTY "TRIEF" (RITUALLY UNCLEAN) AS A POSSIBLE COALITION PARTNER IN THE FUTURE. BURG STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE NRP TO SIT IN A LABOR-LED GOVERNMENT WITH "LEFT-WING" ANTI-CLERICAL PARTIES LIKE MAPAM AND THE CITIZENS RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

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18. CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ ALSO MET PRIME MINISTER PERES AND FOREIGN MINISTER SHAMIR ACCOMPANIED ONLY BY HIS CLOSEST ADVISORS. HE ALSO MET WITH MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO MOSHE ARENS IN HIS EAST JERUSALEM OFFICE.

19. THIS MESSAGE WAS NOT SEEN BY CODEL PRIOR TO

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